Letter no. 34. Sunday - 20 Apr 41.

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My darling Barbara - It is three o'clock in the afternoon, & unless I can help it, I have no intention of doing any more work today. There is only one thing I want to do, & that is to write to you - but by God, I do feel flat. I feel like a vegetable, a stone in the ground, & a piece of wood, all rolled into one. And although I am quite certain that I have dozens of things about which to write you, it seems difficult to get going, because my mood is all wrong. It is so much more enjoyable writing to you, when the words bubble from my pen, & the only reason I stop writing is because it is time to go to bed, or to catch the post - almost certainly you will appreciate those letters more, too. But I expect, after I have written a page or two, I shall get into a swing again, & be able to go on, with pauses, until midnight.

This dreadful flatness, is caused of course, because your letters have stopped arriving; entirely apart from just hearing from you in the ordinary way, there are so many special things about which I thirst & pine for news. It is so hopelessly miserable, not knowing how you are, & what your latest plans are about the baby, & where you are going to live afterwards, & who is going to be with you. We have felt been disappointed, by receiving 2 or 3 letters, & being led to believe that "now everything is alright" - & then there has been a complete dry up & nothing has come along for weeks. A month ago, your letters were coming along splendidly, & I had arrived at the point of expecting one every 3 - 4 days. But now, there is a complete

reversal, & I hardly dare to ask if the post has arrived. And then life is really rather dull, just now. There is plenty of work to do, but it is not at all exciting & not very interesting at the moment! There is so much war going on in Egypt & the Balkans, it seems somehow wrong, & is rather unsettling, to be out of it all, & be just in this place, as a kind of glorified superintendent of police. But I shall not do anything to bring about a change, so don't start worrying about me yet, my darling. that is one thing you have been spared, up till now. It must be horrible for wives & mothers & people, who know that their menfolk are in the battle, & know that casualties are taking place - & have no opportunity of hearing news, for maybe weeks. And for myself, I am so determined & anxious to come home to you, that one fact is so far away more important than any other, that I shall never, in any way, do anything which might stop that happening. No matter how bored & flat I am, or how long it goes on for, or however much I may feel that I want to be off & up & doing. I think now, it is far better to just carry on & see what happens, & not to interfere with fate or the future - unless opportunities appear, in which case, it is permissible to attempt to influence matters.

And then, the other thing which is not helping much at the moment, is that bugs & flies & mosquitos have started to bite. They are really horrible, & the last few days, I have had a hell of a time. Some of them are bugs, I'm certain, & they (as you know, from

Spain) make one feel beastly. And then last night, the mosquitos started on me - zooming past my ears each time I was just about off to sleep. I finally had to get up & start a Moon Tiger - & managed to kill three of them, & had the edifying experience of swatting them on the wall, & seeing my own blood coming out of the bruises. Until I have a mosquito net, I shall now light a Moon Tiger every night, when I go to bed. The nets for all the men & everybody have now been ordered, & I am hoping they will arrive very soon.

I sent you a cable yesterday, confirming this address: this may have been unnecessary, as I hope by now, letters with this address will have arrived. But two of your cables went to the Buffs themselves before coming here, & the rest of the address had been cut out so I thought I would make sure. Probably it is just the fault of the Army P.O. again - it really is exasperating that, when, eventually, one does come by a solid & sensible address, they should go & spoil things by making futile & careless mistakes. I suppose they whistle through the mail at tremendous speed, & see Cheshire, or Worcester, or Buffs, or whatever it may be, & just shove them off accordingly. But surely they could see that it makes more work for them, to send letters to wrong places.

Have you heard yet of this new "Airgraph" method of writing letters, which is planned to bring into use for correspondence between the Middle East & the U.K.

& vice versa? The idea is that, for example, I write a letter to you on a special form, & addressed to you, & then send it off to the Base P.O. There, my letter is photographed onto a tiny negative, & this is sent by the All Air Route to England - where a facsimile, about 5" x 4 inches, is printed from it, & this is posted on to you. The cost is 3d each one, & there is no limitation to the number which can be sent. It sounds a good idea, & really very cheap: I suppose the negatives are so small, that a very large number can be sent by one plane. It all depends really whether the sheets will be large enough to get much onto - & if one writes 2 or 3 consecutively, as one letter, if they will all arrive together, or whether you would be liable to get the last sheet first, & the first one much later, or not at all.
This new idea, the Air Mail letter Cards are alright - but I do think it would be so much better if they would just produce an ordinary, reliable Air Mail service. It makes one feel that the powers that be, are a little out of touch with the real situation.

I told you in another letter that I was going to see a film this week, with Bette Davies & Charles Boyer - I went last night - & found that the programmes changed on Saturdays! I was terribly disappointed. I have not been to the cinema for a month, & I was looking forward so much to some good acting, & being made to feel beautifully miserable. It started off with the news, & then a Popeye, & then next

weeks films – then Walter Connolly & some unheard of people in "The Great Victor Herbert". It was almost too much. My next opportunity now to see a good film, is "Rebecca", in two weeks time. Though, I believe "Destry Rides Again" is somewhere about, so perhaps I shall see that too.

The Officers Mess has been occupying my attention the last few days. In barracks, where we were in the mess of another Regiment – it was horrible, really truly – very expensive. During 6 weeks, I only once found the breakfast bacon fit to eat. And then lunch & dinner were nearly always exactly the same; soup which never once varied, fish which was a pure waste of money – slabs of overcooked beef, covered in thick brown gravy, never any other meat – the puddings were quite good, & then savoury, which was a time out of 5, scrambled egg on damp toast + a touch of Worcester sauce. During all this time, our officers mess cook was in this kitchen, supposed to be gathering experience. And now that we have started our own Mess, it is found that this wretched man has been an apt pupil, & we are just carrying on. And it was costing quite a bit, too. So I decided I could not bear it a moment longer. Fortunately, there is a place where I have to go for lunch every week or so, & where the food is excellently cooked by a native of

some kind. I heard this week that the cook had been given a week's notice. So I had him come to see me today, & have taken him on at £3 a month. There is no doubt we shall have some good food now - & I expect that the economies he will make will go most of the way towards paying his wages. It will make quite a difference if there are some interesting meals to go up to, instead of always knowing exactly what it is going to be. But it is really amazing how useless, practically all men are, when it comes to the practical side of food - & they seem to almost take a pride in their ignorance. All the officers were bored stiff with the food & Moscovitz was the one whose job it is to look after it - but he had no idea at all what to do to bring about some improvement.

The enclosed newspaper cutting may amuse you a little, darling. The annoying thing is that I cannot remember whether I told you about this before, or not. I wrote my ma again this week, & told her something about it, & I have only written you a letter card since the 15th when it happened - so perhaps I did not tell you. There is not so very much to tell really. Except that I never really expected to march in front of a reviewing parade & behind a band - through two miles of main street, in a large town, & with thousands of spectators, wildly cheering & clapping, & throwing flowers. And there was I - a lonely figure, strutting

laughably along in front. I kept thinking that I was almost glad you were not there, because if I had met your eyes, I should never have been able to keep a straight face. There was one very ugly moment, when I turned a corner into another street which went steeply down hill. What with the gradient, & the glassy surface, & my nails, I lost my feet entirely, & the next few paces were a mad skedaddle, with arms flying — but, thank God, I came back on my feet again. This steep hill went on for ¼ mile, & it was again the whole way. I decided firmly, in my mind, that if I did fall down, I should just stay there, like a tired old donkey. It would have been awful. It was a marvellous feeling, returning to the flat again.

The lunch afterwards was quite amusing, & all the men received three large glasses of rather heady Passover wine, & the party broke up in delightfully good order. I may have said what I am reported as saying, but I certainly do not remember it. My men were extremely good, & marched their two miles, with fixed bayonets, in almost Guard like fashion — but the Engineers & people, were pretty fed Karno. I'm told we may be doing some more of this — which suits me alright, as it is a change, for me & the men.

When I was at the R.E.T.D. a fortnight ago, I met a new young 2/Lt from the Cheshires, who had just arrived out here. And he had come

over on the lead with Norman Williamson, of all people. Norman is a very good man, very, very annoying, in his own Boss way - but I rather hope I steer clear of him - he gets into such dreadful scrapes & messes. It seems he is aware of my presence in the Middle East, having found my name in the Duty Officer's book at the I.B.D. I shall have to be frightfully senior & assert my rank, if my path happens to cross his.

I don't think I ever told you about my batman, did I? His name is Chowalzki, he is 21, a Pole, & a very nice little man, clean & fresh, looks after me very well indeed. I got him when I first went to the M.R.T.D. & have had him ever since. He had never done this sort of thing before, & cooking & washing were quite new to him. But he learnt very quickly, & now does everything for me. He also takes good care of Peter, when I am busy or out - & can often be seen walking him up & down the road on the lead & looking rather self conscious.

Corporal Lubitsch, my very pleasant, efficient & intelligent Orderly Room Corporal - I have now made into a Sergeant. He was very thrilled & I thought for a moment, at the time, that he was going to kiss me. The lift to Sergeant is a very real one,

because, apart from the pay, it means living in the Sgts' Mess, instead of in a barrack room, & queuing up for meals in the men's dining hall. He was also at the last two concerts, & we had a long talk about them each, the next morning. He really is a charming outstanding young man — not at all a typical sergeant, but his work is excellent.

I have just been out for some food. I did not feel sufficiently sociable to go up to the Mess tonight. So I got hold of Headley, & we went to a place quite nearby, which has very good food. And then he came back to my room for a beer & a chat — & I have just had a hot bath, & so now it is 11-20 — & that is how the day passes. I have a hot bath every day, before dinner, or before going to bed, & I have a cold bath every day, before breakfast. I wash very thoroughly, & my consumption of soap is enormous — & I never miss my wash, & every time I do not miss it, I think of you, & wish like hell it was you giving it a scrape for me. My health is really very good, & there is no need to worry about that, darling. And about myself in general — well, I really seem to be much the same. My hair & my teeth look good for years! — & there is no change in my figure. My going up of whiskey still holds good, & I have had about two, since I stopped it 5/6 weeks ago. I now, really, drink nothing except 2 or 3 sometimes 4 or 5 beers a day — & an occasional gin & French before dinner. So, that is

another thing not to worry about. The pipe has not been so successful, but that is not really my fault. After about a week, I started ear ache & kind of neuralgia on the left side of my face. So I went to the M.O. He syringed the ear out - & then said I should have my teeth X-rayed. So I said I had heard that one before, & declined. I stopped smoking my pipe, & all the trouble stopped too. So it just seems that my teeth are not strong enough to hold a pipe, which is rather a shame. But I never could smoke on the right side, & on the left side is my bridge tooth. It's now 12-0 - & I must go to bed. I do hope there is a letter from you tomorrow - Monday was my lucky day for some time.

This house has a pleasant little garden - & I am able to gather flowers every few days, which I have in front of my photographs. White roses, & sweet william, & some other pretty coloured small flowers. I look & look at your pictures so much & so often, darling mine. And always I come to the same conclusion, that you are very lovely to look at, & I know you are very sweet & wonderful - & that I love you terribly much, & miss you painfully more than I can say. And the only things I want are for you to be happy, & for me to come back to you soon. All my love to you sweetheart - & to the baby.

Always & forever your own Mary. always. x x x x x x.

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Mrs. H. Massey.
c/o. Mrs Paul.
Lynwood.
Candlemas ~~Hobbs~~ Lane.
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BY AIR MAIL.

Sgt. Lubitsch